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ABSTRACT

The effects of two types of group intervention, Gestalt and sensitivity training, on time orientation or time competence and psychological effectiveness were investigated with 45 college students as subjects. Results indicate that students participating in the groups did not show significant gains in psychological effectiveness as measured by the Personality Orientation Inventory. Intercorrelations of dependent measures indicated that orientations toward time as fluid and as full of possibilities, as compared to orientations toward time as static and event-bound, are more psychologically effective. (Author)

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Effects of Gestalt and Sensitivity Groups on Temporal Orientation and Psychological Effectiveness

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An increasing number of empirical studies have been conducted to determine the effects of sensitivity training groups and marathon groups on various measures of self-actualization and psychological effectiveness. Most studies have examined only one type of group intervention (e.g. Culbert, Clark, & Bobele, 1968; Guinan & Foulds, 1970; Young & Jacobson, 1970; Treppa & Fricke, 1972). Only a few studies have been designed to study effects of differential group procedures and even these few have focused on structure, rather than theoretical foundation, of the groups, e.g. direct vs. nondirect (Kilmann, 1974) and time extended vs. time-restricted (Counseling Center Staff, 1972).

In recent years, Gestalt theory has played an increasing role in the development of group intervention techniques, especially approaches to develop present-centeredness. As with sensitivity training and marathons, empirical research emerges only some years after the introduction of such methodologies into group interventions and initially focuses only on the effects of this particular type of intervention (Goodstein, 1972; Gannon, 1972).

The present study compares the effects of two types of group intervention, Gestalt and sensitivity training, on both general measures of psychological effectiveness and competent temporal orientation, the latter as a dimension of central theoretical importance to Gestalt approaches. It was hypothesized that the Gestalt group, as compared to the sensitivity group, would produce significantly more time competent subjects. In view of the inconclusive findings in studies cited above regarding the effects of sensitivity training and Gestalt group interventions on self-actualization and other measures of psychological effectiveness, no additional hypotheses were specified; rather exploratory analyses were conducted to compare the effects of the two types of groups on psychological effectiveness.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 18 males and 27 females who responded to an announcement read in their introductory psychology course; they volunteered to participate in a self-awareness group experience which would meet two hours each week for three weeks and receive extra credit toward their course grade. Subjects, within each sex, were randomly assigned to a (1) Gestalt, (2) sensitivity training , and (3) "wait-list" group, i.e. they were asked to wait for four weeks before beginning their group experience.

Each group was led by two male coleaders, all of whom had prior experience in leading the type of group which they led.

Instruments

Time orientation was assessed with the time competence (TC) scale of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (Shostrum, 1963) and the Yonge (1973)

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Inventory of Temporal Experiences (ITE). The former has been widely used in studies of outcome of group experience and has been shown to be a reasonably valid measure of self-actualization (Gaff, Bradshaw, Danish & Austin, 1970). In addition to the time competence scale, the POI has 11 other scales (see Table 1) which served in this study as measures of psychological effectiveness.

The ITE was developed by Yonge as a measure of personality. The ITE assesses four coexisting modes of time: Human time is a time of possibilities, choice, creativity, and change, e.g. "I wake up each day to a new world." Vital time is fluid, dynamic and lasting; present and future are intermingled and codefine each other, e.g. "I set long-term goals for myself." Animal time is discontinuous, durationless, static, somewhat overwhelming, a time of instants without horizons, e.g. "I feel carried along by time." Physical time involves locating experiences and events in terms of the clock and calendar, e.g. "I remember the dates of many events in my life." The scales described above are measured by 38, 24, 34, and 15 items respectively developed thru item analyses from an initial 171 items. Subsequent research with 223 college students completing the ITE, the Gough and Heilbrun (1965) Adjective Check List and the Omnibus Personality Inventory (Heist and Yonge, 1968) provide evidence of the measure's reliability and validity.

Because of the increasing evidence of the usefulness of the Barron Ego Strength (1953) Scale (ES) in understanding the outcomes of group experiences (Kimball and Gelso, 1974; Jones and Medvene 1975), this measure was administered also to subjects in the present study. The scale consists of 68 true-false items taken from the MMPI. Previous research has demonstrated adequate reliability (Gaines and Fretz, 1969) and validity (Frank, 1967).

Procedures

Both the Gestalt and sensitivity group treatments consisted of three two-hour sessions held once each week for three weeks. Group leaders used specific techniques and exercises appropriate to the Gestalt and sensitivity training orientations. Examples of Gestalt exercises included mirroring speech and facial expressions, making a "group machine", and mirroring and experiencing another group member's mask. Care was taken in the sensitivity group to include only those exercises which were nonoverlapping with Gestalt exercises. Exercises were provided in listening to others, labeling feelings, giving constructive feedback and trusting one's own feelings. (A complete list of the exercises utilized is available from the authors.) None of the leaders knew what inventories were being used to assess the outcomes of the group experiences or the hypothesis regarding time orientation. The "wait-list" control subjects were simply informed that a group for them was not yet available but would be in four weeks.

In accordance with recommendations by Kroeker (1974), this research employed a posttest only design, thereby precluding pretesting as a confounding variable. As Campbell and Stanley (1963) have noted, a posttest only design is "usually to be preferred to Design 4 (pretest-posttest) unless there is some question of the genuine randomness of the assignment" (page 26). Consequently, the three inventories described above were administered to the Gestalt and sensitivity training groups one week after the final group

session. At that time the "wait-list" control subjects were informed that a group was now available and were asked to complete the three inventories, i.e. at the same time as the Gestalt and sensitivity subjects. All subjects and leaders were then informed of the nature of the study and sensitivity training sessions were begun with the control subjects so desiring.

The 45 students completing the group session and inventories varied from as few as five males to as many as nine females completing one of the treatments. Initial analyses included all 45 students; however, since an equal number in each group was required for interpretation of the interactions in some of the analyses described below, subsequent analyses were completed using a total of 30 subjects, five of each sex from each treatment and control group. Subjects were chosen randomly from those cells of the design with more than five usable subjects. Statistical main effects did not differ in the two sets of analyses; equal n analyses are reported herein.

Results

Two types of analyses were completed to assess the effectiveness of treatment. For each of the four ITE scales, the 12 POI scales and the ego strength scale, a two by three analysis of variance (sex by treatment) was computed. The four ITE scales, the two major scales of the POI (time competence and inner directedness (ID)) and the ego strength scale are all statistically independent and therefore could also be included in a multivariate analysis. Means and standards deviations of all variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Gestalt, Sensitivity, and Control Subjects On Time Orientation and Psychological Effectiveness Scales

		Gestalt Group Subjects		Sensitivity Group Subjects		Control Subjects	
Scale		n=5 Female	n=5 Male	n=5 Female	n=5 Male	n=5 Female	n=5 Male
ITE							
Animal	Mean	25.0	31.8	25.4	37.6	23.4	32.2
Time	SD	3.3	15.7	10.6	6.5	9.7	25.9
Physical	Mean	15.8	15.6	14.2	28.6	22.6	14.8
Time	SD	8.9	10.2	8.5	6.8	12.3	14.1
Human	Mean	67.2	75.8	66.4	75.2	70.8	65.4
Time	SD	6.4	11.5	7.5	7.4	10.9	10.6
Vital	Mean	36.8	25.2	31.6	36.8	38.8	34.4
Time	SD	7.0	13.3	11.8	9.4	9.6	8.6

Table 1 Continued

Scale		Gestalt Group Subjects		Sensitivity Group Subjects		Control Subjects	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
POI							
Time Competence	Mean	17.8	15.2	17.6	13.6	15.0	14.8
	SD	1.9	4.4	2.8	1.5	2.9	4.8
Inner-Directedness	Mean	84.4	84.8	90.6	84.2	85.2	87.0
	SD	6.1	11.8	8.8	6.7	9.6	13.5
Self-Actualizing	Mean	20.8	20.2	21.8	19.0	20.4	18.2
	SD	2.2	2.9	2.0	2.2	2.6	3.7
Existentiality	Mean	21.2	22.0	23.0	19.8	20.6	23.6
	SD	3.7	1.4	6.9	3.4	2.6	5.6
Feeling Reactivity	Mean	16.2	16.6	17.0	15.0	16.2	15.0
	SD	1.9	2.8	1.9	0.8	2.7	4.8
Spontaniety	Mean	13.8	12.2	13.8	11.8	12.6	14.2
	SD	1.9	3.2	2.2	2.7	2.3	2.5
Self Regard	Mean	11.0	11.8	12.4	12.2	12.2	13.0
	SD	1.4	4.3	1.8	1.3	1.0	2.1
Self-Acceptance	Mean	15.4	17.0	17.2	14.4	14.0	19.0
	SD	2.3	3.1	3.7	2.4	3.3	1.2
Nature-of-man	Mean	13.2	10.6	12.4	10.0	11.6	9.0
	SD	0.8	5.7	1.8	1.5	2.0	3.5
Synergy	Mean	7.0	6.0	8.0	7.0	6.8	5.8
	SD	1.2	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.4	2.1
Acceptance of Aggression	Mean	16.6	14.6	17.8	18.0	16.0	15.0
	SD	2.3	2.4	2.1	1.8	3.3	4.6
Capacity Intimate Contact	Mean	19.4	18.4	19.4	19.6	18.8	19.6
	SD	2.6	1.8	4.3	2.9	2.4	5.3
EGO STRENGTH	Mean	43.8	45.0	44.6	41.0	44.8	49.2
	SD	4.9	7.6	4.7	3.7	2.5	5.6

The hypothesis regarding the effect of the Gestalt treatment on time orientation was tested with planned comparisons of the mean of the Gestalt group against the combined means of the sensitivity group and control group subjects for 1) the POI time competence scale, 2) the ITE vital time and 3) the ITE human time (the "psychologically effective" time) scales. None of these planned comparisons were statistically significant in the hypothesized direction; for vital time the comparison was significant ($t = 5.40$, $p < .05$) in the direction opposite to that predicted, with the Gestalt group males showing a very low mean. The two by three analyses of variance for all five time orientation measures (TC, vital time, human time, animal time, and physical time) yielded no statistically significant ($p < .05$) F - ratios, indicating neither treatment affected any measured aspect of time orientation.

The analysis of the comparative effects of Gestalt and sensitivity groups on the remaining 11 POI scales and the ego strength scale yielded nonsignificant results. The only statistically significant F-ratio obtained in these 12 analyses was from the interaction of sex and treatment for the self acceptance scale ($F = 8.45$, $df = 2,8$). Given the possibility of Type I error in this number of analyses of variance, even this one significant result must be considered cautiously. The interaction is best described by noting the rank order of means within sex across group, i.e. male sensitivity subjects highest, followed by Gestalt and then control subjects; the reverse order was obtained for females.

Multivariate tests further confirmed the above nonsignificant results. Using Wilk's Lambda criterion for the test of significance, $F = 1.12$ for treatment, $F = 2.04$ for sex, and $F = 1.32$ for interaction of treatment and sex. These data indicate that the groups could not be differentated on the basis of their scores on the four ITE scales, the POI TC and ID and ES scales combined.

In a posttest-only design it is always debatable whether intercorrelations of measures should be examined for subgroups or for the total sample since treatments were expected to differentially affect the variables. Given the above evidence of the absence of treatment effects, correlations for the seven independent scales in this study are presented in Table 2 for the total sample. (Additional analyses of subgroups, by sex and treatment, reveal similar patterns of intercorrelations in terms of direction and magnitude.)

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients of Time Orientation Measures, Inner-Directedness and Ego Strength

Scales	Physical Time	Human Time	Vital Time	Time Competence	Inner-Directedness	Ego Strength
ITE						
Animal Time	+.33*	-.47*	-.43*	-.54*	-.38*	-.43*
Physical Time		-.09	-.04	-.28	-.20	-.37*
Human Time			+.28	+.22	+.32*	+.19
Vital Time				+.15	+.03	+.06
POI						
Time Competence					+.75*	+.33*
Inner Directed						+.47*

*p< .05

Discussion

As a first consideration for discussing the nonsignificant results obtained, it can be noted that the mean ES scores of all subgroups falls in the low range identified by Jones and Medvene (1975). In that study low ego strength subjects did not evidence gain, as measured by the POI, from a marathon group. In the present study, the lack of significant changes in time orientation or gains in psychological effectiveness could similarly be a function of the low ego strength of the subjects, Clearly, in view of the more positive outcomes obtained in some prior studies with subjects of high ego strength (e.g. Kimball & Gelso, 1974) the present study should be replicated with high ego strength subjects.

At the same time, the results do suggest that a short-term Gestalt-oriented group does not provide a better intervention technique for working with low ego strength subjects in the development of psychological effectiveness. Is it appropriate to seek to effect changes in time orientation and psychological effectiveness for low ego strength persons? Do they lack, by definition, the strength to deal with the increased broadening of horizons, freedom and fluidity which characterize human time and vital time, and with the existentiality, synergy, etc. which characterized a self-actualized person? As suggested by Kiesler's (1971) grid model for research in counseling and psychotherapy, we need not only patient variables and treatment variables within the same design, but possibly outcome measures as well.

Several factors may have reduced the possibilities for obtaining statistically significant results. The structured Gestalt exercises employed in this

study have not been empirically validated as significantly better than any other Gestalt exercises for changing time orientation. Would other exercises be more effective in bringing about such changes? Are six hours of structured treatment over a three week period too brief to expect significant change with low ego strength clients? The POI TC scale and the ITE measures of time orientation may tap quite stable time orientations which are difficult to change through brief group interventions. The POI TC scale is one of the least often affected scales by encounter group interventions (Note # 1). Given the primary emphasis of Gestalt theory on present orientation, perhaps an especially designed measure of present time orientation should be developed for a more adequate test of the contributions of Gestalt based interventions. The measures used in this study, while chosen as reasonable representations of psychologically effective time orientations, are defined as providing more for a balance or intermingling (vital time) or expansion of horizons (human time) of past and future time perspectives as well as present time perspectives.

The intercorrelations of the measures provide perhaps some of the most useful information in this study. These data suggest a psychologically effective time dimension (all positive correlations of vital time, human time and TC with ES and ID, the latter both frequently cited as measures of positive mental health) that can be differentiated from psychological ineffective time (all correlations of the latter are negative with animal time and physical time).

Reference Note

1. Knapp, R.P. Encounter group experience and self-actualization, Research and Test Development News for Educational and Industrial Testing Service, San Diego, California 92107, Volume 2, Number 1, Summer, 1973.

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